

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 DHA-02 EUR-12 ACDA-07 IO-13 EB-07 TRSE-00
OMB-01 COME-00 AGRE-00 /098 W
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R 241200Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6814
INFO AMEMBASSY VICTORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT LOUIS 0680

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDIP PGOV PINS PINT ECON ETRD MP UK UR SE SO FR
SUBJECT: MAURITIUS WEEKLY REVIEW - JUNE 24

REF: PORT LOUIS 659

SUMMARY. PORT LOUIS 679 PROVIDES A SUMMARY OF THIS CABLE. END
SUMMARY.

1. ON HIS RETURN TO MAURITIUS FROM ATTENDING THE COMMONWEALTH
CONFERENCE, PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM WAS ASKED BY THE PRESS ABOUT
GOM RECOGNITION OF THE NEW RENE REGIME IN THE SEYCHELLES. HE
REPLIED: "PERSONALLY I DON'T LIKE THE IDEA OF PUTTING OUT A
LEGALLY CONSTITUTED GOVERNMENT BY A COUP. WE HAVE GOOD NEIGHBORLY
RELATIONS WITH THE SEYCHELLES. IN FACT, MR. RENE HAS ASKED
US TO RECOGNIZE HIS GOVERNMENT. FIRST I MUST DISCUSS IT WITH
MY COLLEAGUES IN THE CABINET. IN THE FRANCOPHONE COUNTRIES THEY
RECOGNIZE STATES, NOT GOVERNMENTS. WE ARE BOTH FRANCOPHONE AND
MEMBERS OF THE COMMONWEALTH. THE COUP WAS A GREAT SURPRISE TO
US. I DO NOT LIKE THE IDEA OF DEMOCRACY BEING CRUSHED BY GUNMEN.
HERE ALSO THERE IS SOME IDEA OF A COUP D'ETAT FLOATING IN THE AIR.
MAURITIUS DOESN'T WISH TO MIX INTO THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS
OF OTHER COUNTRIES. PRESIDENT CARTER HAS PLEADED IN FAVOR
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OF RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. ALL THIS (THE COUP) IS AN
INTEGRAL PART OF THE SAME PROBLEM."

2. AT HIS AIRPORT PRESS CONFERENCE RAMGOOLAM WELCOMED THE
ELECTION OF BREZHNEV AS CHIEF OF STATE OF THE USSR, PRAISING
HIM AS SOMEONE WHO HAS WORKED FOR PEACE AND THE LESSENING OF
WORLD TENSIONS AND WHO HAS APPROACHED THE QUESTION OF ARMS
CONTROL IN A REALISTIC MANNER. RAM EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT
BREZHNEV AND PRESIDENT CARTER WILL WORK TOGETHER TO REDUCE
TENSIONS AND TO ACHIEVE THE DEMILITARIZATION OF THE INDIAN

OCEAN SO THAT THE LITTORAL STATES CAN LIVE IN PEACE.

3. RAMGOOLAM LATER CONFIDED TO THE AMBASSADOR THAT HIS REMARKS AT THE AIRPORT ABOUT BREZHNEV -- MADE IN FRONT OF THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR -- WERE A CALCULATED EFFORT TO BUTTER UP THE SOVIETS. AFTER WHAT HAPPENED IN THE SYCHELLES, RAM SAID, "I KNOW THEY ARE AFTER US HERE TOO."

4. AT THE AIRPORT PRESS INTERVIEW RAMGOOLAM ALSO SAID THAT THE COMMONWEALTH CONFERENCE HE HAD JUST ATTENDED WAS THE MOST FRUITFUL MEETING HE HAS BEEN AT SINCE 1961. MAURITIAN MILITANT MOVEMENT (MMM) PARTY PRESIDENT JUGNAUTH, WHO RETURNED FROM EUROPE WITH RAMGOOLAM, ECHOED THIS IN AN INTERVIEW WITH LE MILITANT (AS REPORTED EARLIER) THAT HE FULLY SUPPORTED THE POSITIONS TAKEN BY THE GOM AT THE COMMONWEALTH CONFERENCE. HE REMARKED THAT THE OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND SUCH A CONFERENCE WAS A VERY USEFUL EXPERIENCE FOR HIM PERSONALLY.

5. PAPERS IN PORT LOUIS HAVE PUBLICIZED MMM SECRETARY GENERAL BERENGER'S SECOND VISIT TO THE SYCHELLES SINCE THE COUP AND HIS STATEMENTS THERE THAT HE EXPECTS ELECTIONS BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR IN MAURITIUS WHICH WILL BRING THE MMM TO POWER. HE ALSO PREDICTED MAURITIUS WOULD BECOME A REPUBLIC BY DECEMBER, CONFIDENTIAL

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AND SAID HE PLANNED TO INSTITUTE "HIS OWN KIND OF SOCIALISM" HERE WHEN HE COMES TO POWER AND TO COVERT THE INDIAN OCEAN INTO A NEUTRAL ZONE. LE MAURICIEN PUBLISHED PICTURES OF BERENGER POSING IN THE SYCHELLES WITH RENE AND SOME OF HIS WELL-ARMED MILITIA, PICTURES THAT ARE LIKELY TO BE FEATURED IN FUTURE ANTI-MMM CAMPAIGN LITERATURE IN MAURITIUS. HIS PERSONAL BLESSING OF THE RENE REGIME THAT CAME TO POWER THROUGH A COUP IS AROUSING FEARS HERE THAT HE'D LIKE TO DO THE SAME THING IF HE COULD, AND HIS EARLIER STATEMENT THAT THE MMM WOULD COME TO POWER SOON " WITH OR WITHOUT ELECTIONS" IS BEING REPLAYED IN THE PRESS. (LE MILITANT REPORTED THAT BERENGER PLANS ADDITIONAL STOPS THIS COMING WEEK IN TANZANIA, MOZAMBIQUE, MADAGASCAR AND THE COMORES BEFORE RETURNING TO MAURITIUS.)

6. THE ANTI-MMM NEWSPAPERS HAD EARLIER IN THE WEEK TAKNE PLEASURE IN REPUBLISHING A PICTURE (AND STORY) FROM THE SEYCHELLES "NATION" WHICH SHOWED BERENGER MEETING WITH RENE SOON AFTER THE COUP THAT BROUGHT THE LATTER TO POWER. THE MAURITIUS "NATION" NASTILY LABELLED THE PICTURE "MEETING OF THE TWO WHITE LEADERS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN..."

7. LAUNCHING A DEBATE IN LE CERNEEN ON THE SUBJECT OF WHETHER MAURITIUS SHOULD BECOME A REPUBLIC OR NOT, FORMER LABOR PARTY MINISTER RAYMOND RAULT ARGUED AGAINST. AMONG OTHER ARGUMENTS, HE SAID THAT IF THE SEYCHELLES HAD NOT TRIED THE "REPUBLICAN EXPERIMENT" PERHAPS THE "SOVIET IMPERIALIST" WOULD NOT HAVE OVERTHROWN THE ELECTED PRESIDENT AND INSTALLED THEIR MAN, RENE.

BUT HIS MAIN ARGUMENT WAS THAT MAURITIUS SHOULD NOT MAKE AN "INFANTILE GESTURE" WHICH WOULD SPEARATE IT FROM ITS LONG-TIME FRIENDS, THE BRITISH, AND THEIR STRONGLY DEMOCRATIC, PARLIAMENTARY TRADITIONS.

8. AN ENVOY OF SOMALI PRESIDENT SIAD BARRE, MUHAMUD ALI, MET WITH RAMGOOLAM JUNE 22. HE TOLD THE PRESS LATER HE HAD DISCUSSED OAU QUESTIONS, DJIBOUTI, THE INDIAN OCEAN AND THE RED SEA. HE ALSO SAID HE PLANNED TO TALK WITH THE COMMERCE MINISTER ABOUT TRADE
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RELATIONS IN SUGAR AND TEXTILES BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

9. IN THE ECONOMIC SPHERE THE MINISTER OF PRICES HAS IMPOSED PRICE CONTROLS ON A NUMBER OF BASIC COMMODITIES FOR THE ISLAND OF RODRIGUES, WHOSE INHABITANTS HAVE LONG SUFFERED FROM PRICE GOUGING BY UNSCRUPULOUS IMPORTERS/MERCHANTS. (THE WONDER IS THAT IT HAS TAKEN THE GOVERNMENT SO LONG TO IMPOSE THIS MEASURE.)

10. A SEMINAR SPONSORED BY THE PRIVATE SECTOR'S JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE HAS BEEN EXAMINING THE RESULTS OF A STUDY MISSION SENT SEVERAL WEEKS AGO TO SINGAPORE AND HONG KONG WHOSE PURPOSE WAS TO LEARN HOW THOSE TWO TERRITORIES HAVE ACHEIVED SUCH ECONOMIC SUCCESS. THE MISSION POINTED OUT THAT SINGAPORE AND HONG KONG HAVE MUCH SMALLER LAND AREAS THAN MAJRTIUS BUT SUPPORT MUCH LARGER POPULATIONS AT A HIGHER STANDARD OF LIVING THROUGH INTENSIVE INDUSTRIALIZATION. THE MISSION CONCLUDED THAT THEIR SUCCESS RESULTS FROM THE APPLICATION OF NEARLY UNRESTRAINED FREE ENTERPRISE PRINCIPLES, MINIMAL GOVERNMENT REGULATION AND RED TAPE, POLITICAL STABILITY, GOOD LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS, LOW AND STABLE WAGES, NUMEROUS INCENTIVES FOR THE INVESTOR, AND A CONCENTRATION BY ALL PARTIES ON MAXIMIZING PRODUCTIVITY.

11. THERE IS FEAR HERE THAT THE NEW PROTECTIONIST MEASURES ANNOUNCED BY THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT RESTRICTING IMPORTS OF TEXTILES WILL SEVERELY AFFECT THE MAURITIAN TEXTILE PLANTS WHOSE PRINCIPAL EXPORT MARKET IS FRANCE. DETAILS ARE NOT YET AVAILABLE HERE, BUT IS IS HOPED THAT THE NEW MEASURES WILL NOT HAVE AN ADVERSE IMPACT ON MAURITIUS IN VIEW OF THE VOLUNTARY AGREEMENT LIMITING TEXTILE EXPORTS TO FRANCE THAT THE GOM ENTERED INTO LAST NOVEMBER.

12. THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE HAS EXPRESSED ITS BELIEF THAT THE NEW FRENCH RESTRICTIVE MEASURES ON TEXTILE IMPORTS WILL NOT AFFECT MAURITIUS BECAUSE IT HAS ITS OWN SEPARATE AGREEMENT WITH
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FRANCE, THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE HAS SAID JUST THE OPPOSITE, HOWEVER. RAMGOOLAM TOLD THE PRESS THAT IN HIS OPINION FRANCE OUGHT FIRST TO RESTRICT DAMAGING IMPORTS FROM NON-COMMON MARKET COUNTRIES, AND ONLY IMPOSE RESTRICTIONS AFTERWARDS

ON COUNTRIES (LIKE MAURITIUS) ASSOCIATED WITH IT.

13. TOURISM CONTINUES TO GROW, WITH AN INCREASE OF 12.5 PER CENT
IN TOURIST ARRIVALS DURING THE FIRST THREE MONTHS OF THIS YEAR
COMPARED WITH THE SAME PERIOD IN 1976.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 22-Sep-1999 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL SUMMARIES
Control Number: n/a
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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977PORTL00680
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: 11652 GDS
Errors: n/a
Expiration:
Film Number: D770226-0961
Format: TEL
From: PORT LOUIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t197706110/baaaeuym.tel
Line Count: 172
Litigation Code IDs:
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Litigation History:
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Message ID: d0209e73-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: PORT LOUIS 659
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2013586
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MAURITIUS WEEKLY REVIEW - JUNE 24
TAGS: PDIP, PGOV, PINS, PINT, ECON, ETRD, MP, UK, UR, SE, SO, FR
To: STATE INFO VICTORIA
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/d0209e73-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009